

RELICS OF THE HOLY INFANCY.

Given the natural desire, common to all peoples in all ages, to preserve mementos or souvenirs of departed friends and benefactors, the veneration accorded by Catholics to sacred relics calls for no special explanation or justification. That objects pertaining to or possessed by the glorious martyrs, confessors, and virgins whose lives have formed the truest poetry of the centuries, should be treasured by their co-heirs of the faith is in its final analysis, not a particle more surprising than that we should carefully preserve keepsakes of relatives and friends who are now no more.

The greater the degree of sanctity resident in the individual whose relics are the object of our veneration the more highly are these relics prized; hence the wealth of reverence manifested in the care and the cult of the various treasures associated with our Blessed Lady, and the intensified homage shown to such relics of our Divine Lord as have fortunately survived the disintegrating forces of time and exposure.

In the Basilica of Saint Mary Major, at Rome, are preserved certain relics of the Nativity of Our Lord, concerning which a goodly number of Catholics have little or no knowledge, and of which the present is an appropriate season to give a brief account.

First of all, the basilica possesses several rocks detached from the Grotto of Bethlehem. The stable whither Mary and Joseph betook themselves on the eve of the Nativity was in part a natural grotto, in part a constructed one, according to a custom that still prevails in Oriental countries, and is found even in Italy and other portions of Europe. The wall against which the manger was supported was, later on, covered with a species of plaster and adorned with paintings, traces of which may still be discerned on the pieces brought to Rome.

Besides these rocks, Saint Mary Major possesses the Crib of Our Lord, the Sacra Culla of the Italians (*Incunabulum* in Latin), in which the Blessed Virgin placed the Infant Jesus after having wrapped Him in swaddling clothes; these clothes, with the bands, or strings, that held them in place; the mantle of Saint Joseph, which served as a quilt; and, finally, the straw with which the crib had been filled before Our Lady placed therein her Divine Son.

Formerly, this altar was situated in the great nave, a little in advance of the main altar. When Pope Sixtus V. built the magnificent chapel which bears his name, the chapter of Saint Mary's begged him to preserve intact the old chapel which had been for so many centuries the object of the veneration of the faithful. The architect accordingly received orders to dig below the new chapel a space large enough to contain the old one, which was transported, entire, down an inclined plane to the place it occupies at present, under the altar of the Blessed Sacrament. A leaden chest, or box, enclosed in the altar contain species of rock incised with marble and plaster, detached from the Grotto of the Nativity, and the straw upon which the Redeemer lay.

In the urn of prophecy which serves as the table of the main altar, two smaller marble urns, holding pieces of the boards of the crib, with portions of the straw, the linen clothes, and the mantle of the Saviour. These urns, with an inscription by Pope Paschal I. set in place in the ninth century, were found intact when the work of repairing was undertaken in 1750.

To the two sides of the principal urn are attached vases of silver and crystal, which permit a view of the clothes, the bands, and the straw of the crib. A piece of St. Joseph's cloak is enclosed in a reliquary given to the Church by Pope Pius IX. It was detached from the precious and magnificent relic preserved in the Church of St. Anastasia, where the Pontiff formerly celebrated the Mass at the Dawn on Christmas morning.

Finally, in a splendid reliquary of silver and crystal, kept ordinarily in the Chapel of the Crucifix, are preserved the most precious of the relics of the Nativity—the boards that formed the Infant Saviour's Crib. The Holy Crib no longer exists in its primitive form. It was a little bed formed of several boards—a cradle which not only received the Infant Jesus at His birth, but served also as His resting-place on the back of the ass during the flight into Egypt. The boards are five in number, each about two feet long and six or seven inches wide; with a sixth and smaller one, which seems to be a mere fragment.

Blanchini, who obtained from Benedict XIV. permission closely to examine the boards, discovered that they were covered with an ancient gold-threaded cloth, on which appeared a Greek inscription. During a session of the Archaeological Academy held at Rome in the month of December, 1893, the learned Father Cozza-Luzi satisfied himself that this inscription had been intended to adorn a painting with figures of gold and serving as a reliquary for the swaddling clothes of the Saviour. The silver and crystal reliquary in which the boards are contained is surmounted by a golden statue of the Infant Jesus, life size, reposing upon the straw and in the act of blessing.

The Crib of Our Lord is presented to the veneration of the faithful only once a year. On the 24th of December it is first exposed on an altar in the great sacristy. Then the four youngest canons of Saint Mary Major, preceded by all the clergy, carry it in solemn procession to the Sistine Chapel. After the Mass of the Aurora, they take it back and expose it

on the tabernacle of the main altar. At 3 o'clock in the afternoon, at the close of the second solemn Vespers, the Cardinal Protector of the basilica, followed by a concourse of the clergy, venerates once more the holy relic; a process verbal is drawn up attesting the identity of the Crib and the details of the ceremony; after which it is again enclosed, to be displayed no more until the following year on Christmas Eve.

The principal portion of these treasures are preserved at the Altar of the Crib.—Ave Maria.

AN ENGLISH FRIEND OF IRELAND.

Denouncing the Times on the Financial Relations Question.

In an able article on the Financial Relations Question, the London Saturday Review writes thus honestly: "As we have already pointed out more than once, this question has now passed from the stage of speculation and invective into that of ascertained fact. How to deal with the facts laid before Parliament in official State papers is a matter about which there is no legitimate but wide difference of opinion, but to deny the facts because they may lead to unpleasant consequences is simply a piece of vicious perversity, and yet this is what the Times has been doing three times a week since the present movement in Ireland took shape."

Once more, then, who were the witnesses, and what do they tell us? I have taken them in the order in which they appear in the blue book—Mr. H. H. Murray, chairman of the Board of Customs; Mr. J. Pittar, principal of the Statistical Office of the Board of Customs; Sir Alfred Milner, chairman of the Board of Inland Revenue, and Sir Edward Hamilton, Assistant Secretary to the Treasury. We have also the Irish Registrar General, the Irish Commissioner of Valuation and the chairman of the Irish Public Works Department, but we may allow these poor Castle officials to go by the board along with the rest of the Times' ruffians and traitors. The four officials from Whitehall are good enough for us. In fact Sir Edward Hamilton's memorandum, which appears in the form of an appendix to Vol. I of the evidence, contains the result of the whole research on the subject, and every person—Times leader writer or other—should be compelled to read that memorandum carefully before he presumes to express an opinion on the question.

Having described the financial relations between the two countries during the first half of the present century, the Saturday Review continues: "And so we come down to 1853, the real crucial year of the whole financial connection between the two countries. Ireland was paralyzed by the famine and by the rush of free agricultural imports, which effectively prevented the farmers from getting on their feet again. Here, everyone will say, was the time for the application of those particular exemptions or abatements to which Ireland was entitled by reiterated pledges. Yet this was just the period Mr. Gladstone chose for laying on successive duties in pursuance of the great scheme of 'financial reorganization' carried out by himself and his successors, until Ireland, instead of getting abatements or relief, had her general revenue raised to £7,700,000, an increase of 58 per cent, the portion devoted to Imperial purposes being raised from £2,613,000 to £5,596,000, an increase of 106 per cent. I doubt if any civilized country, except in the course of an actual life and death struggle, has ever had its taxation increased in such a proportion within a single decade. Now, how does the Times deal with this statistical fact when it is forced on its notice after three weeks of random declamation about Home Rule and other irrelevantities? 'Ireland,' says the Times, 'suffered, it is true, but her loss was fully compensated by the importation of cheap food, the repeal of the sugar duties, and the reduction of the tea duty. Could any sentence more fully illustrate the meaning of Heine's phrase—'Here is a country almost exclusively food producing, whose very life depends on the prices she gets for the food she grows, and yet she is told that she is compensated for double taxation by a reduction in the price of the article she has to sell.' These are things that drive intelligent Irishmen, Unionists and Nationalists, almost to madness, and if the Irish Unionist Party is shattered and destroyed within the next six months, the Government will have the inevitable stupidity of the Times to thank for the disaster."

Of what spirit is he who comforts himself with a full meal and a cheering fireside, if his brother be starving and freezing upon his doorstep? How much less defensible is he who thus enriched and happy, has received all those comforts precisely on condition that he should share them with those who have them not! We seem to forget that all men are called to the same salvation as ourselves, have the same divine right to know the truth, and that the Holy Spirit invites each and every one to enter both the Church Militant, the Church Suffering and the Church Triumphant on an equal footing with ourselves.—The Missionary.

Much of life's misery is due to indigestion: for who can be happy with a pain in his stomach? As a corrective and strengthener of the alimentary organs, Ayer's Pills are invaluable, their use being always attended with marked benefit.

DEFENDED BY A PROTESTANT MINISTER.

Rev. George W. Pepper Abhors Anti-Catholic Prejudice.

In a sermon upon the life and character of Washington in Brecksville M. E. church, Rev. George W. Pepper in speaking of that clause in the constitution which declares that no religious test shall be asked of any one in the United States, denounced all secret political proscription organizations as anti-American, contrary to the teachings of Washington. He quoted Randolph's famous sentence, "I have seen a white crow and heard of black swans, but an Irish opponent of American liberty I never heard of or saw." He also quoted from Judge Black, a distinguished member of the Disciple Church, that five times the Irish aided in saving our liberties. He closed as follows:

"As a Methodist and a Protestant of the Protestants, I cannot permit the opportunity to pass without uttering an indignant protest against all attempts to violate the constitution and to dishonor the immortal memory of the father of his country by wanton and infernal attempts to impugn the loyalty of our Roman Catholic fellow-citizens. It is only a few years ago that the Methodists were defamed in like manner; that their bishops, their elders, their preachers were declared to be so many wheels to grind the rights of the people; that their episcopacy was said to be anti-American."

"Now, it is the Catholics who are accused of a divided allegiance. I take my stand upon the records of the last hundred years of American history. In the war of the revolution who was it that Washington thanked for his patriotism? The Catholic Archbishop Carroll. Who was the most renowned signer of the Declaration of Independence? The Catholic Charles Carroll of Carrollton. Who was the first admiral of the American navy? The Catholic John Barry."

"Was there an ocean or a bay during that revolutionary struggle not whitened with Catholic bones and reddened with Catholic blood? They were true to their allegiance and unshaken in their fidelity to the American constitution. As time rolled on, in the war with Mexico, who was it that bore the brunt of the battle, whose body was riddled with bullets? The Catholic General Shields. In the war for the union, on every battlefield, did not Catholic German, Catholic Irish, Catholic American bleed and die for the land of Washington and freedom? Were they cowards? Were they traitors? Next to Grant the loftiest names were the Catholic Sherman and the Catholic Sheridan. Where is there an American who does not love their memories?"

"Need I name Thomas Francis Meagher, the pure, gallant, generous, eloquent cavalier, the commander of the Irish Catholic Brigade, which received the thanks of Congress for their grand devotion to the country; that Irish brigade which exerted from the confederate general, A. P. Hill, at Fredericksburg, the exclamation, 'There comes those infernal green flags again!'"

"Who would have whispered to the soldiers of the Potomac that my old friend Meagher and his soldiers were traitors to the union? New York, the Empire State, did not think so when the crowds surged up like a human sea to bid them welcome upon their return. Lincoln did not think so—that Catholics were disloyal—when, according to Col. Hay's admirable history, he declared that if know-nothingism ever became rampant here he would emigrate to Russia. History does not say that Catholics are unfit for freedom. Behold Belgium, and exclusively Catholic country, electing a Protestant king a few years ago! Behold Hungary, electing Kossuth, the glorious Protestant, governor! Behold Catholic Poland, first emancipating the injured Jew! Behold Catholic Ireland, affording shelter to the English Protestants when they fled from the persecutions of Mary!"

"These defamed Catholics have American hearts, American feelings, and I will never submit to the imputation which is refuted in a hundred pages of history and written in characters of blood."

The Holy Family.
Among the other devotions to which Catholic custom and piety consecrates the month of February is the one which dedicates its days to contemplation and veneration of the Holy Family whereof the Christ Child and His Blessed Mother and Foster Father were the component persons.

What better devotion can be counselled to Christian home, or from what one can more edifying, consoling and strengthening lessons be drawn? The Christian father can learn from St. Joseph, that model of virtue, how to conform his life so that he may discharge all the duties that devolve upon him as the head of his own household. The Christian mother may learn from the contemplation of the Blessed Virgin's life proper obedience to her husband, loving regard and care for her offspring and the practice of all those virtues which Mary possessed in so eminent a degree and illustrated in her every thought, word and deed. And the children can find in the Christ Child an exemplar—whose perfection they cannot of course aspire to, but which they can nevertheless imitate—of filial piety, reverence and love; for the Gospel tells us when His parents went to Nazareth to abide, He accompanied them and was subject to them.

In these days when we hear so much

of family dissensions and feuds, of improvident fathers, negligent mothers and undutiful children, there would certainly seem to be need of a greater devotion to the Holy Family. Catholic custom consecrates this month of February to that devotion. Why should not every Christian home profit by the opportunity thus given it of modelling itself after that blessed household of Nazareth? Its own peace and pleasure and happiness, to say nothing of higher motives, ought to incite it to practice that devotion.—Catholic Columbian.

IN AN UNEXPLORED FIELD.

Cardinal Gibbons Appoints Priests for Non-Catholic Mission Work.

Cardinal Gibbons has just set apart two of his priests, the Rev. Charles Warren Currier and the Rev. Thomas Dolan, to be missionaries to the non-Catholics in the diocese of Baltimore. One of the most remarkable signs of the times is the enthusiasm and energy with which the non-Catholic mission work is being inaugurated in many places throughout the country. The line on which this work is organized is the utilizing of the regular missionary energy among the secular clergy. For this purpose bands of missionaries are found consisting of the diocesan clergy. The Cardinal has appointed two of his priests for this work.

A very successful mission to non-Catholics was given in St. John's Hall, Baltimore, through the invitation of the Rev. George Devine. The audience, large in the beginning, increased every night, and on the last night about one thousand two hundred persons were present, including several ministers. Father Currier writes of the mission:

"We were, at least the last two nights, overwhelmed with questions. These were answered before the lectures by my companion, the Rev. Thomas Dolan, in his plucky style, with occasional flashes of humor. The lecture of the last night took the form of a dialogue between the Rev. F. Dolan and myself, the Rev. Father assuming the role of an inquiring Protestant, and I solving his difficulties. This appeared to give great satisfaction to the audience. During the services there was congregational singing, in which the whole audience heartily joined."

"We have now several engagements on hand for this work, and hope to meet with equal success. Maryland offers a hitherto unexplored field for this missionary activity."

A Daily Martyrdom.

The martyrs who gave up their lives at one stroke of the sword, or even at the end of a day's agony, purchased their crown easily. Abundant grace sustained them, their senses were sometimes numb with hunger and pain, and death was a welcome release.

There are martyrs, though, who day after day, year in and year out, sacrifice themselves, their inclinations, their will and their self-love, who bear their cross, who keep up trust in darkness, who are sure that God is benign in spite of the constant afflictions that He sends them.

Here is a man whose wife has become a drunkard, or a slattern, or a gossip, or a shrew, despising him, neglecting his children. He has been a good man all his life. Why should he be so unfortunate? He goes on his way, concealing his grief from the world, praying for his unworthy spouse, submissive to God's allotment to him.

Here is a woman who is a poor widow, who has met with reverses of fortune, who has to drudge amid squalid surroundings, whose heart is ground by the monotony of menial cares, whose spirit longs for the ease and comfort and joy of nice surroundings, but who represses herself to glorify her sordid life by resignation.

Here are others in gloom of soul, in vexation, in sorrow, in sickness, in shame; who stand steadfast in faith and hope; who get up in the morning resolved to the true and trusting for at least one more day; who cannot understand the mystery of woe but who yet are willing to be moulded by it into the likeness of Christ.

Oh, these are martyrs, whose robes must be regal and whose crowns must sparkle and glow with burnished gold and gems beyond price! They shall reach their high thrones by way of the martyrdom of daily life through years of tribulations!—Catholic Columbian.

Why do not the Men go to Church?

"Why do not more men attend church?" was the question discussed by the Fellowship Club of Terre Haute, Ind. The club is composed of college professors and professional men. Their opinion was that men remain away, because from a purely business motive, they do not get the worth of their money.

Others reasons could be easily suggested. The absence of any obligation to attend church, the utter insufficiency of Protestant worship to satisfy the reasonable and natural cravings of the human heart, and the perpetual change and constant contradiction in the teaching of doctrines that are even held to be fundamental, disgust the manly soul, and with what freedom of individual judgement, which his religion grants him, he prefers to stay at home and worship God after his own manner—which means not to worship Him at all. Step inside of a Catholic church Sunday morning and behold the crowds of men.

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Catholic Skinflints.

There are Catholics who hunt the city for a short Mass, where they dash in one door and out the other, and imagine they have done their duty to their God. They would put the Mass on the same level as a railway eating-house, where travelers are given ten minutes for meals. It is a deadly sin, of course, to remain away from Mass on Sundays without good reason, but somehow or other we would have better hope for a man who absents himself altogether than for the man who tries to escape sin by giving short measure. God is generous to the generous, but it is said that the devil himself dislikes the skinflint.—The Monitor.

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FIVE-MINUTE

Sept. 1896

"I will not not servant know I have called y whatsoever I have made know"

Could our proof of H stated: "a cle divine reve Light through accepted by spiritual po above nature."

I think, something o virtue of Fa mind it pro consider the "But I ha Friend is a pre ship is a pre are children divine faith that childre and timel father? Be ment betwe and his h been a dea sought reco awkwardne collections the forgive need of con it but in some shado of friend. the divine I gotten.

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If you give the ator: sa and mal